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Deeper Magic

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Deeper Magic: Theology of the Body in C. S. Lewis and John Paul II

George French

"The regenerate science I have in mind would not even do to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself."
C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*[1]

"Nature cannot be conquered by violating its laws."
John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*[2]

C. S. Lewis tells us that science and magic are "twins." "They were born," he says "of the same impulse"[3] of man to master the natural world. We think of them very differently because science has succeeded where magic has failed, but that should not make us blind to their "strong family likeness."[4] Science and magic are intertwined for much of their history, and it is in the Enlightenment that the two begin to separate. While magic died and science survived, Lewis thinks that modern applied science still retains much of the "family likeness." Unfortunately, not all of the family traits it retained are healthy.

Lewis distinguishes between good and bad magic. There is magic that

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1974), 79.
[2] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, Rev. ed. (London: Fount, 1982), 229.
[3] Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 76.
[4] C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harper Collins, 2000–2006), 3:475.

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works *with* nature (*magia*) and there is magic that works *against* nature (*goeteia*). *Magia* (i.e., "high magic") is an acceptable form of mastery of nature because it accords with the *Tao*,[5] but it is harder in practice because it involves respecting boundaries which are transgressed by *goeteia*: this is why Doctor Cornelius is only a "very minor magician"[6] while the White Witch has the power to cast all of Narnia into perpetual winter. He describes *magia* as a sort of "coaxing" out of nature's "spiritual qualities," whereas *goeteia* views nature as "a machine to be worked."[7] Lewis worries that the development of science has been most heavily influenced by the latter way of thinking. This means that, at its worst, science sees nature as something only to be used for selfish ends, never enjoyed for its own sake. This has allowed the various physical sciences, otherwise "good and innocent in themselves,"[8] to be co-opted for malicious ends such as the exploitation of natural resources and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

The problem does not lie in the scientific method itself. Rather, it is the animating attitude of science which has gone wrong, and "something like repentance"[9] may be necessary to correct it. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis envisions a "regenerate science" which is able to remain aware of the value and beauty of the natural world even while mastering it for useful ends:

> The regenerate science I have in mind would not even do to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained, it would not explain away. When it spoke of the parts it would remember the whole. While studying the *It* it would not lose . . . the *Thou*-situation.[10]

[5] *Tao*, or "The Way", is the central concept of *The Abolition of Man*. It is a right way of living in the world which recognizes the objectivity of value and the demands this recognition places on our behavior.

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 342.

[7] C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, in *The Space Trilogy* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 621.

[8] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:129.

[9] Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 78.

[10] Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, 79; Lewis is referencing a work by the philosopher Martin Buber in which he distinguishes between the *I-Thou* and the *I-It* relations. The significance of this distinction will be explained in Section I.

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It would be more like *magia* than *goeteia*. The practitioners of this new science would aim to work within the natural order and with respect to its limitations, not against it. They would seek to master nature in the way a man domesticates a dog: by making it into his companion, not his slave.

This point is worth dwelling on a bit more to avoid any confusion. Lewis develops it more in the character of Merlin from *That Hideous Strength*, the fictional counterpart to *The Abolition of Man*. Ransom says the following of him:

> For [Merlin] every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead — a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases . . . [The N.I.C.E.] thought the old *magia* of Merlin, which worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with the new *goeteia* — the brutal surgery from without. No. In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way. Do you know that he is forbidden . . . to use any edged tool on any growing thing?[11]

Note that Merlin's knowledge of "Nature" (always capitalized) is "personal," allowing him to understand her qualities "from within." This connotes something like empathy, a seeing "from within" someone else's view. Unlike the N.I.C.E., he can see "Nature" as a *Thou*, not a mere *It*.

This may ring superstitious to modern ears. Lest we misinterpret Lewis as advocating for a complete return to Dark Age alchemy, we should take note of the phrase "in some different way." Indeed, we could not return to Merlin's "earth-magic" even if we wanted to, for the very "soul [of Nature] has gone out of the wood and water," presumably exorcised by our illicit meddling in her affairs.[12] What, then, does Lewis have in mind? How can *magia* be reintroduced to modern science if it cannot be combined with *goeteia*? Rather than tackle this question head-on, we would do well to narrow our scope and make our inquiry more concrete.

Given the fact that there are different disciplines of science, it seems reasonable to say that they must be made regenerate in their own ways. In this essay, I would like to propose at least one scientific discipline

[11] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 621. Lewis's emphasis.
[12] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 623–4.

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that I think is being regenerated according to the Lewisian vision: human anthropology. [13] I trace the beginnings of this regeneration to the catechetical lectures of John Paul II entitled *Theology of the Body* (TOB). John Paul II defines anthropology as the "fundamental science about man."[14] Its proper object is the human person in all its biological, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions. John Paul II aims to draw the pre-existing science of anthropology, especially the parts of it pertaining to human sexuality, up into a theological atmosphere in order to supply it with fresh insights about the human person. The result is what he calls a "theological anthropology" of the human person.

How does one justify the claim that TOB is a "regenerate science"? One way is to show that it satisfies the requirements that Lewis imposes in the quotation above: It must explain without explaining away, *etc.* I will show this in Section I. Another way is to choose as a test case an issue which both Lewis and John Paul II addressed and to compare the assessments of each thinker. Broad agreement between them would be good evidence that John Paul II's thought is consonant with Lewis's. I have chosen the moral question of artificial contraception (*e.g.,* barrier methods, the Pill, and sterilization) as such a test case. I do so because it is a prominent (albeit subliminal) theme in *That Hideous Strength* and because it is one of John Paul II's greatest concerns in TOB. Dr. Michael Ward has written elsewhere[15] about Lewis and the issue of contraception; I will expand on his conclusions and connect them to TOB in Section II. This will lead to a comparison of the two thinkers in Section III that will justify TOB as a legitimate "regenerate science." While I find much agreement between the two, I will discuss the ways in which John Paul II's analysis of contraception allows him to go one step further than Lewis into considerations of licit forms of birth control.

[13] It should be noted here that both Lewis and John Paul II tend to use "science" in the more general sense of *scientia*, a unified body of knowledge. The modern definition of science, which reduces all knowledge to the quantifiable, is only a subset of this. Thus, anthropology, which sometimes lacks the mathematical rigor of, say, physics, is a science.

[14] John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (TOB), ed. and trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), sec. 126.

[15] Michael Ward, "C. S. Lewis and Contraception," *First Things*, 3 November 2022. https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/11/c-s-lewis-and-contraception.

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The "Great Mystery" of Sexed Embodiment

John Paul II's TOB is personalistic: its basic value is the human person. The person is both an objective reality (a "being") and a subjective reality (a "self"). Every person is "unique and unrepeatable"—namely, an individual person is more than just another instance of the category "human being." This is because every person has a subjective lived experience that no other person has. John Paul II summarizes the value of the human person by saying that "the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love."[16]

There are two key concepts from TOB's analysis of romantic love that I want to highlight: *self-giving* and *the spousal meaning of the body*. Self-giving is rooted in a basic fact of nature: human persons are self-governing, *i.e.*, free agents. This enables persons to "gift" themselves to one another, an act in which the person surrenders himself or herself to the other and opens up his or her hidden interior life to be shared. Reciprocated self-giving is essential to love; this is especially true of spousal love because it reveals a value and a beauty that goes beyond the physical meaning of sexuality.[17] The consequence of living in a sinful world is that the human person is afflicted with *carnal concupiscence* which introduces a tendency to selfishness and lust. This weakens a person's capacity for love because he or she, facing the allurements of sin, is no longer able to perfectly and freely exercise self-giving. This is why love (especially romantic love) also requires *self-mastery*.

The spousal meaning of the body is also rooted in a natural fact: the division of the sexes. Their distinct reproductive biologies convey deep sexological and psychological realities about male and female persons. John Paul II's primary observation is that both sexes are only fully understood in the light of the other—male bodies do not make sense without female bodies and *vice versa*. But more notably, the biological distinction also has profound theological significance which John Paul II connects to the "great mystery" of Ephesians 5:21–33.[18] He says,

[16] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.
[17] John Paul II, TOB, 15.
[18] All biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

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> The body . . . and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus to be a sign of it.[19]

This elevates the conjugal union to something sacred and inviolable as the very act of procreation now takes on eschatological meaning, namely, the sign of the marriage feast of the Lamb in Revelation 5. If the sexual union of the spouses is distorted in any way, *e.g.*, through sexual abuse, then the union loses its eschatological symbolism. Thus, self-mastery is also necessary for protecting the spousal meaning of the body.

These two principles—self-giving and the spousal meaning of the body—allow us to analyze the act of using artificial contraception. TOB informs us of two dangers inherent to the use of contraceptives, regardless of the couple's motives. The first is that in the act of contracepting the spouses withhold from one another their own fertility, which is an essential aspect of their sexuality. In this way they fail to make of themselves complete self-gifts. Even if they do not acknowledge it, the willful act of incomplete self-giving makes for an incomplete act of love. It also amounts to an affront to the spousal meaning of the body in its denial of procreation as an essential charism of spousal union. Christopher West goes further and adds that this reserved connubial union is contrary to the marital vows:

> If spouses willfully contradict any of these goods of marriage in their sexual expressions, marital intimacy becomes less than God intended it to be. In turn, spouses, rather than renewing their vows through intercourse, contradict them. In practical terms, how healthy would a marriage be if spouses were regularly unfaithful to their vows?[20]

The intentional act of rendering the conjugal union sterile resounds in its effects on the marriage as a whole. With the loss of its procreative dimension, TOB predicts that the other "goods of marriage"—including its unitive dimension—will be lost too.

The second danger that John Paul II sees pertains to precisely this

[19] John Paul II, TOB, 19:4.

[20] Christopher West, "Basic Theology of Marriage," *Crossroads Initiative*, 9 February 2016. https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/basic-theology-of-marriage-christopher-west/.

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point. He affirms the principle that a person "cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end"[21] because this would amount to a denial of what the human person is: a subject and not a mere object. Spouses can violate this principle in two ways, both of which destroy the unitive dimension of marriage. The first is by treating each other merely as a means to produce children. The second is by treating each other merely as instruments of pleasure. Contraception, he thinks, runs the risk of falling into the latter pitfall. Doing so constitutes a two-fold violation of the dignity of personhood, of the spouse's and of one's own. First, it reduces a unique and unrepeatable subject to a mere object, as was just stated. Second, it circumvents the need for self-mastery as it allows for virtually unrestricted sexual access to the other; this is contrary to one's own dignity as a person for whom self-mastery is a natural power that must be developed in order to foster the capacity for free self-giving.

John Paul II does, however, defend the use of certain natural forms of birth control. These methods rely on periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse with recourse to naturally occurring periods of infertility in the female's ovulatory cycle. Today, these forms of birth control (such as the Billings method) often go by the umbrella term Natural Family Planning (NFP). There are ways that NFP can be abused, *e.g.*, if the couple deliberately uses it to avoid having children for selfish reasons. The reason that it is not always harmful to the couple in the way contraception is lies in the fact that it works within the boundaries set by the nature:

> *Nature cannot be conquered by violating its laws.* Mastery over nature can only result from thorough knowledge of the purposes and regularities which govern it. Man masters "nature" by exploiting more and more effectively the possibilities latent within it.[22]

Here, just as with Lewis, "mastery" is not to be conflated with "domination." Rather, it can be taken as synonymous with "domestication." The difficulty of the human condition is that carnal concupiscence makes self-mastery very difficult, and it is easier to fix the problem using artificial means. But false mastery only sets man at war with his own sexual nature. John Paul II recognizes this, and it is precisely why he spends the second half of

[21] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 41.
[22] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 229.

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TOB discussing marriage *qua* sacrament. The sanctity of marriage must be preserved, he says, because it is "a living and life-giving part of [the] salvific process"[23] wherein man's sexual nature finds the healing it needs in divine grace.

We can already see how John Paul II's teachings on contraception lend themselves to the interpretation that contraception serves as a sort of *goetic* twist in the sexual order. On the other hand, NFP presents itself as a sort of *magia* by the way it draws on "the possibilities latent" in man's sexual nature. We will return to this in Section II. In order to be considered a "regenerate science," TOB must satisfy the requirements that Lewis gives in the passage quoted above. It must be able to (1) explain without explaining away, (2) speak of the parts without losing sight of the whole, and (3) study the *It* without forgetting the *Thou*. The third comes from Martin Buber who, like John Paul II, contributed greatly to Personalism. For our purposes, his distinction between the "I-It" and the "I-Thou" relations helps us to distinguish between treating persons as mere objects of our experience (*It*s) and recognizing them as unique and unrepeatable subjects (*Thou*s).

We will take each of the three criteria in turn. How does TOB explain? We have seen that it uses theological insights to draw out deeper truths of the human person from natural facts about biology without explaining away the person's uniqueness and unrepeatability. For example, the "great mystery" of Ephesians 5 allows us to move from the division of the sexes to the spousal meaning of the body. How does TOB speak of the "parts" of what it studies (the human person)? Taking the example of marital intercourse, we saw that TOB analyzes it in such a way that it cannot be fully reduced to the "biological and physiological sexual processes" which constitute its physical reality. These insights are "very important, very fitting, very valuable",[24] but they do not exhaust the significance of the act. The whole is only understood when all of the disparate physical facts are united by an understanding of the dynamic of love between the spouses which is essentially interpersonal. How does TOB remember the *Thou* while speaking of the *It*? The personalism which undergirds TOB allows for the human person to be understood in two dimensions, the person's objective "being" and subjective "self." These refer to the *It* and the *Thou*,

[23] John Paul II, TOB, 102:8
[24] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 288.

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respectively. The very definition of the person precludes any analysis that attempts to take the *It* without the *Thou*.

The Issue of Contraception in *That Hideous Strength*

Dr. Ward's article "C. S. Lewis and Contraception" gives a brief but thorough summary of Lewis's views on the topic. Before turning to *That Hideous Strength*, I want to draw attention to just two of the points Ward makes.

First, Lewis was keenly aware that contraception had changed the public attitude towards sexual promiscuity. Before contraception, fornication ran the risk of casting the girl into social disrepute, so it was seen as an offense against charity. The removal of the negative consequences also removed this acute sense of guilt from the public conscience. Ward does not cite Lewis's letter to Rhona Bodle (1955), but I quote it here as it illustrates Lewis's concern very succinctly:

> It certainly seems v. hard that you shd. be told to arm the young against Venus without calling in Christ […] And indeed now that contraceptives have removed the most disastrous consequence for girls, and medicine has largely defeated the worst horrors of syphilis, what argument against promiscuity is there left wh. will influence the young unless one brings in the whole supernatural and sacramental view of man? [25]

The only solution he sees is to recall a "sacramental" view of man and sexuality that has been lost. We will see that this is precisely what he is doing with his "theologised science-fiction."[26]

Second, Lewis believes that marriage has a "natural and proper procreative end"[27] which cannot be removed from it without causing damage. A friend of Lewis, Sheldon Vanauken, confided in him that he and his late wife had used contraception so as not to strain the love they had for each other by introducing children into the mix. Lewis's reply (1955) is both heartfelt and stern. He allows for no ambiguity on the question of what the Vanauken's decision to keep their "One Flesh" childless amounts to:

[25] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:600.
[26] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:517.
[27] Ward, "C. S. Lewis and Contraception."

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> . . . this One Flesh must not (and in the long run cannot) "live to itself" any more than the single individual. It was not made, any more than he, to be its own End. It was made for God and (in Him) for its neighbours — first and foremost among them the children it ought to have produced. . . . The experience of a woman denied maternity is one you *did not & could not* share with her. To be denied paternity is different & trivial in comparison.)
>
> One way or another the thing had to die. Perpetual springtime is not allowed. You were not cutting the wood of life according to the grain. . . . You have been brought to see (how true & how v. frequent this is!) that you were jealous of God.[28]

He sees marriage as first and foremost as an institution of God. Man's tampering is a manifestation of the original sin wherein he tried to decide good and evil for himself. This only serves to make it into something less than what it is, especially when one removes the offspring it "ought to have produced." It also worth noting that Lewis thinks that the wife suffers more from a sterile marriage; we will see how this plays out in our analysis of Jane. Even on this minor point we see agreement with TOB which recognizes that a woman's biology imprints her potential maternity onto her mind from an early age. In contrast, a man only fully discovers his paternity in the light of the woman's maternity.

With these two points in mind, we turn now to an analysis of the Studdock's marriage. Jane and Mark must come to terms with the full meaning of being "One Flesh" in distinct ways, so we will examine them independently. We will use a helpful three-staged hermeneutic of *crisis*, *test*, and *redemption*. The crisis marks the character's recognition of his/her own faults and the resolution to amend them, the test marks the moment this resolution is tried, and the moment of redemption occurs right before the couple reunites in the novel's conclusion. The redemptive arc that each follows involves the character allying himself/herself to his/her respective cosmic power from ancient mythology: Jane to Venus and Mark to Mars.

The novel opens with a citation of the Book of Common Prayer: "Matrimony was ordained, thirdly," Jane reads, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other."[29] The opening

[28] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:605–6.
[29] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 349.

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line cuts out the first two purposes of matrimony, procreation and avoidance of fornication, an undoubtably suggestive act on Lewis's part. The word "contraception" never appears in the novel, but Lewis leaves no ambiguity as to its presence: we are told that "they were to have no children, at any rate for a long time yet."[30] This is an obvious loss of the first purpose of marriage. The second purpose is also lost given Lewis's view that contraception effectively lifted the prohibition on fornication for those who do not share the Christian "sacramental view of man" (neither of the Studdocks are Christians at this point).

The result of losing the first and second purposes of marriage is that the Studdocks also lose the third. Jane reflects "bitterly" on the fact that her marriage feels "something like solitary confinement." Mark has been anything but a source of "mutual society, help, and comfort" to her. In fact, he has been largely absent from the home, both physically and emotionally:

> For some years before their marriage she had never seen so little of Mark as she had done in the last six months. Even when he was at home he hardly ever talked. He was always either sleepy or intellectually preoccupied. While they had been friends, and later when they were lovers, life itself had seemed too short for all they had to say to each other. But now... why had he married her? Was he still in love? If so, "being in love" must mean totally different things to men and women. Was it the crude truth that all the endless talks which had seemed to her, before they were married, the very medium of love itself, had never been to him more than a preliminary?[31]

Without a doubt, Lewis's greatest critique of the popular conception of marriage is the notion that "being in love" is the centerpiece of it. He makes this point in Chapter 6 of *Mere Christianity*, in Letter 18 of *The Screwtape Letters*, and in many of his private correspondences. He writes to Daphne Harwood (1942) that on the "scale-of-values" in marriage, the state of "Being-in-love" ranks "in fact about on a level with friendship."[32] This is because the state of "Being-in-love," like the state of being friends, is not a strong enough foundation on which to weather the inevitable storms of a life-long commitment as significant as marriage. Rather, a healthy marriage

[30] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 350.
[31] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 349.
[32] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:510–11.

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must be built on what he elsewhere calls "constancy in love."[33] Jane does not recognize this, and consequently she begins to worry that her marriage to Mark has failed.

Jane will not admit to herself that her sterile intercourse with Mark may be a source of dysfunction between them, nor that her house feels empty because it lacks children. Quite the contrary, she seems quite proud of the liberation that contraception has won her. We are told that she is "not perhaps a very original thinker and her plan had been to lay great stress on Donne's 'triumphant vindication of the body.'"[34] Jane has adopted the popular view that the ability to contracept is a sign of mastery over the body and of freedom from being weighed down by childbearing; one is vindicated from the sufferings and hardships that come with unplanned family life. By insisting that she has full autonomy over her own body, Jane really means that she is free from being dependent on others and from their dependence on her. But her actions speak against her. She feels a deep sense of loneliness being alone at the flat and impulsively buys hats as "a stimulant and a consolation."[35] A simple question ("Do you hate being kissed?") brings her unexpectedly to tears. She admits to feeling "depressed." When she begins to crack under the pressure of her clairvoyant dreams, she feels like a "fool" for seeking help from Mark and the people at St Anne's-on-the-Hill.[36] Lewis is showing us that Jane's insistence on her own "vindication" and independence only weakens her, ruins her capacity for solitude, and draws her away from Mark, although the latter is only half her fault.

Through all of this, it becomes clear that the question of motherhood looms large in Jane's mind. The emptiness of her flat is oppressive and her isolation during Mark's working hours becomes more unbearable every day. The question takes on a more noticeable form in the person of Mrs. "Mother" Dimble, the barren wife to one of the professors at Bracton College. Mother Dimble often inquires into Jane's marriage: "She's always dying to know whether I'm going to have a baby. That sort of woman always is."[37] She is the "sort of woman" who has always desired to have children

[33] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:979.
[34] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 350.
[35] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 365.
[36] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 383, 385.
[37] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 366.

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of her own yet cannot, so she invests herself in her husband's pupils, a stark contrast to Jane. Though without children, she is a constant maternal presence throughout the narrative; her embrace calls Jane's mind back to her own mother.[38] In addition to Mother Dimble, Jane also seeks refuge at St. Anne's Manor, St. Anne being the mother of the Virgin Mary and the grandmother of Jesus.

Jane's *crisis* occurs on her first visit to the Director, Ransom. When she asks to become an official member of his conspiracy against the N.I.C.E., she is repulsed that he would prefer that she tell Mark first. She prepares to confront him about his "old-fashioned" idea of marriage to which she ardently does not subscribe, but he quickly disarms her with his questions. While she does not want to consult Mark about joining the group, Jane realizes that she is even unhappier at the disruption the secret causes in their already-strained marriage.[39] Whether or not Mark has any right to know becomes an irrelevant fact. With this startling admission, she becomes conscious of her own selfish pride and makes the first step towards humility.

On the train ride back to her flat, Jane has another revelation. While her ego still smarts from the Director's chastisements, she finds herself in a newfound "state of joy." She catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror:

> And [Jane] rejoiced also in the consciousness of her own beauty; for she had the sensation — it may have been false in fact, but it had nothing to do with vanity — that it was growing and expanding like a magic flower with every minute that passed. . . . Certainly she was looking well: she was looking unusually well. And, once more, there was little vanity in this. For beauty was made for others.[40]

In her little act of humility (compliance with the Director's wish), she tastes freedom of a different sort, a kind that takes her outside of herself. Lewis uses the imagery of a flower in bloom, signifying a springtime of new life in Jane; indeed the surrounding text is full of springtime imagery. She has become more conscious, not less, of her own beauty, but she delights in it in a new, selfless way. Jane later muses that persons are "mirrors enough to

[38] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 367.
[39] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 483.
[40] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 489.

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see each other,"[41] perhaps giving a more accurate image of our true selves than our own reflections.

Her *test* comes much later in the novel. After seeing a vision of Venus, the goddess of fertility, Jane finds herself in the garden at St. Anne's, and she becomes aware of the presence of God for the first time in her life. She must decide whether or not to meet him "with no veil or protection in between." This prompts her to new depths of humility until "the little idea of herself which she had hitherto called *me* dropped down and vanished, unfluttering, into bottomless distance, like a bird in a space without air."[42] It is only once she has let go of the false version of herself that she had been clinging to that she can allow herself to be "captured" by divine grace.[43]

When she finally goes out to meet Mark in the lodge at the end of the novel, she is described as "going down all the time, down to the lodge, *descending the ladder of humility*" (emphasis mine). The descent opens her up: to true love, yes, but also to "children . . . pain . . . and death." In order to prepare herself to love and to be loved, she must also be ready to suffer along with the beloved and to make the sacrifices of motherhood. She wonders if Mark will be waiting for her to receive her love as he has so often failed to do in the past. In the end, the sight of Mark's clothes confirms his presence, and she opens the door to meet him.[44] This is Jane's moment of *redemption*.

In the character of Jane, Lewis is critiquing the modern view of matrimony. The primary purpose of matrimony (literally, "mother-making") is to make mothers—the "partnership" of the spouses comes after on the "scale-of-values."[45] In this way we see that Lewis sees matrimony as essentially sacrificial, especially for the mother. It must be open to love and to labor. Jane has taken the vows of matrimony, yet she refuses to be made a mother. This is why Merlin calls her the the falsest lady of any at this time alive."[46] The lesson she must learn is that the only way to save her marriage to Mark is to embrace it for all that it is, i.e., matrimony.

[41] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 698.
[42] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 654.
[43] See also, Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 649–54.
[44] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 718.
[45] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:510–11.
[46] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 613.

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This requires a great act of humility on her part. She must be willing to embrace matrimonial love by setting aside her ego and risking becoming vulnerable and dependent. The Venusian dimension of "constancy in love" is the continual disposal of self to the reception of love and the fostering of new life. Jane must be prepared to meet Mark "with no veil or protection in between."

While the novel's introduction to Jane begins with the word "matrimony" and returns to this theme often, we are told that Mark is concerned with a "very different matter." He preoccupies himself with climbing the social ranks at Bracton College and the N.I.C.E. He is compliant with the will of his superiors and allows himself to be bullied at times in order to secure a respectable job. Lewis hints at the futility of this in the fact that Mark repeatedly asks to receive his paycheck, always getting vague bureaucratic excuses in response. To console himself, Mark begins to spend what little money he has left on drinks. Lewis places a much greater emphasis on this than on Jane's indulgence in hats. He is reminding us that Mark is self-serving, and that all of the meager fruits of his labor go to selfish pleasures.

Mark almost never allows himself to think about his marriage to Jane. His interests are entirely self-centered. He concerns himself with advancing his own career to the detriment of his relationships, and he often uses his work as an excuse to avoid being at home. This further reinforces the fact that Mark's work serves no one but himself, that everything else in his life is subservient to his own ambitions and desires.

But while he hardly ever thinks of Jane, he is not able to be completely ignorant of his poor marital situation. He knows that his marriage is strained, that the love he has for Jane and she for him is growing cold, but he will not make the sacrifices necessary to effect any change. Even when Jane is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, he thinks that it is a "pity" that this moment should come when he was "not perfectly sober." Nevertheless, he is able to see through the barrier between them, although only briefly, in this rare moment of emotional rawness with Jane:

> There was a quality in the very muscles of his wife's body which took him by surprise. A certain indefinable defensiveness had momentarily deserted her. He had known such occasions before, but they were rare. They were already becoming rarer. And they tended, in his

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> experience, to be followed next day by inexplicable quarrels. This puzzled him greatly, but he had never put his bewilderment into words.[47]

Mark understands that even in the tender moments of spousal union with Jane, there are still certain emotional barriers placed between them. As a result, he finds those moments soured, leading to quarreling in the morning, and becoming less frequent. Lewis once wrote to Arthur Greeves (1931) that "sexual rapture is there to lead to offspring and family life"; Mark can sense a tangible loss in the sexual rapture of union with Jane, but because he will not "put his bewilderment into words" he cannot see the cause. He remains oblivious, and Jane continues to feel "deeply angry" and "betrayed." True to his character, Mark tries to arrange for someone else to take care of Jane so he can leave for several days on business.

Mark's slavish devotion to the N.I.C.E. does not increase his status; quite the opposite, he becomes the tool and object of abuse for the higher-ups. This leads to his *crisis*. When he tries to escape from the N.I.C.E., he finds himself unable to. He is eventually imprisoned on false murder charges, and it is in his cell that he finally begins to interrogate the motivations behind his decisions. Why had he wanted to become a member of the organization at all? Why did he want to impress Feverstone, Wither, and the rest? He begins to realize that he was living yet another instance of a long pattern that wove throughout his past, one of seeking acceptance and self-importance. He looks back with disgust on a life spent living as "the odious little outsider who wanted to be an insider." This moves him to begin looking outside of himself and to consider the people in his life that had been hurt by his foolishness. He reflects on his relationships with the four most significant persons in his life: his twin sister Myrtle, his two best friends, and Jane. In each case he becomes aware that he has treated each of them as instruments in the pursuit of his own happiness. He had "conquered" Myrtle and "wholly drawn [her] into his orbit," he had "thrown away" his friends, and even now he was reducing Jane to his "hostess."[48] Mark realizes that his false sense of magnanimity has led him to look at everyone else in his life as mere satellites of himself. He thought

[47] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 381.
[48] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 579–83.

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that happiness could be found by making their lives revolve around his. This examination of conscience brings Mark great sorrow, but with it also comes "a strange sense of liberation."[49]

Mark's *test* comes soon after. Having accepted his impending death at the hands of the N.I.C.E., Mark resolves "for the first time in his life" to do the right thing. He is asked to step on a crucifix to prove his allegiance. The "defenselessness" of the crucified Christ laying at his feet begins to work at Mark's heart. Even though he is not a Christian, Mark is moved by sight of helplessness:

> He was on the verge of obeying, and getting the whole silly business over, when the defencelessness of the figure deterred him. The feeling was a very illogical one. Not because its hands were nailed and helpless, but because they were only made of wood and therefore even more helpless, because the thing, (or all its realism) was inanimate and could not in any way hit back, he paused. The unretaliating face of a doll — one of Myrtle's dolls—which he had pulled to pieces in boyhood had affected him in the same way and the memory, even now, was tender to the touch.[50]

In his first act of true selflessness, Mark is prepared to give his life for another's sake when he could easily save his own skin. Even if Christ was not divine and there was nothing salvific about his crucifixion, "was *that* the moment at which to turn against the Man?" He allows the spirit of Mars to fill him with purpose and self-sacrificing courage. He chooses to "go down with the ship" rather than trample the innocent. He embraces the possibility of martyrdom for a God in whom he does not yet believe. Mark finally acts in service of another.

Mark's *redemption* finally comes on his walk to St. Anne's Manor. As he longs for Jane, we are told that "Mark's body knew better than his mind had known till recently, and even his sensual desires were the true index of something which he lacked and Jane had to give." Mark is coming to terms with his own insufficiency. He is described as a "dry and dusty world" needing to be brought to life by Jane's "freshness." He comes to terms with the fact that he has never fully committed to loving Jane. He had believed that he loved Jane, but he had nothing to show for it. His love had never

[49] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 603.
[50] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 671.

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cost him anything, never required him to sacrifice anything in service of her. His position had been all taking, never giving. He admits that he "had gone wrong . . . in assuming that marriage, by itself, gave him either power or title to appropriate [Jane's] freshness."[51] He is deeply ashamed of himself for the injustice with which he has treated Jane and thrice repeats his act of contrition: "How had he dared?" At last, he sheds his "laboratory outlook upon love" and thinks of Jane for the first time not as a woman or even a wife, but as a "Lady," regal and robed in splendor. A lady is always the subject of one's honor and devotion. He is accepting that in order to love Jane, she must occupy a higher status in his life than himself.[52]

In order to meet her, Mark must climb the hill to St. Anne's. As far as symbolism goes, a hill serves just as well as a mountain. The mountain is always the place where an individual goes to encounter the divine or sacred. It is a supreme act of self-abasement to make the trek up the mountain; it requires the admission of higher values than oneself. Mark must go *up* to meet Jane. He must enter her orbit, not drag her into his. The first person he sees when he reaches the Manor is not Jane, but the "divinely tall" and fearsome goddess Venus. She has prepared a lodge for the couple with "food and wine and a rich bed": all of the loving comforts of home Mark had desired but could not find without first ascending the mountain.[53]

Lewis is illustrating that while Venus is the goddess of fertility, love does not reside in her alone: she is completed by Mars. But what has the god of war to do with fertility? Among other things, Lewis recognized that Venus tames Mars.[54] The martial spirit loves by self-sacrifice, and this is the lesson which Mark must learn. He must suffer *with* her by being present such that her pains become his. He must suffer *for* her by working to provide for her and not only for himself. The martial dimension of "constancy of love" is the continual offering up of oneself to serve the needs of others. Mark must learn to cherish Jane by laying his life down for her instead of making her life revolve around his: "He must give her her freedom."[55]

In summary, Jane must learn that she cannot be invulnerable and must open herself up to love and suffering. Mark must learn that he cannot serve

[51] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 696.
[52] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 716–7.
[53] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 718.
[54] See the penultimate paragraph of Ward, "C. S. Lewis and Contraception."
[55] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 696.

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himself and must be willing to devote his labor to the service of others. The two must live out the union of Venus and Mars. Their use of contraceptives is a harm to this union because it allows them to love with reservation and without the suffering that accompanies parenthood. On Lewis's view, marriage requires both Venus and Mars, one to receive and nurture new life and the other to lay his life down in support of this end. The "theologised" version of this is the spousal union of Christ and the Church in Revelation 5, but he cleverly presents this in mythological trappings. Lewis was not attempting to conceal his theology—he has no problem making references to Christ throughout the Ransom Trilogy—rather, it seems more likely that he was remaining within his intellectual wheelhouse. Lewis was a medievalist, after all.

The Regenerate Science

While Lewis never expressly states it, the attitude of the novel points to contraception acting as a *goetic* twist in the sexual order. It bends the otherwise good sexual nature using a creation of modern science to circumvent the working-within that is necessary for its proper use, for a kind of spousal *magia*. If this is true, then he ought to conclude that artificial contraception is inherently wrong and can never be used by Christian couples, not even in good faith. "Ought to" because it is not a conclusion that Lewis definitively draws. As Ward points out in his essay, we can infer something about Lewis's views on contraception from the "distinct coolness" he maintains towards the practice, even if he never states it explicitly.

Ward is right when he says that the Studdock's marriage is failing in the novel's opening because they are "stifling" the possibility of experiencing the necessary suffering that accompanies parenthood and strengthens spousal love. He also very perceptively notes that their use of contraception demonstrates a failure to show "complete self-giving" and is an affront to their "human embodiedness."[56] We now see that two core principles of marital love from TOB—*self-gift* and *the spousal meaning of the body*—allow us to read Lewis in a clearer light. These concepts also enable us to pinpoint how each character's flaws are interwoven with the couple's use of contraception. We will turn to this now.

[56] Ward, "C. S. Lewis and Contraception."

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Jane must learn humility by giving up her insistence on self-reliance and independence. There is a paradox in Jane's simultaneous desires for invulnerability and for "mutual society, help, and comfort." The latter is incompatible with the former. Under the curse of Eve, God declares that "in pain you shall bring forth children" (Gen. 3:16); for this reason, Jane must accept that matrimony makes her vulnerable, that it requires her to trust Mark and to receive his affection. This is the feminine dimension of self-giving. She accepts this with the admission that her "beauty was made for others"—namely, it is meant to be gifted. Herein she discovers the spousal meaning of her body. Her potential maternity is an omnipresent concern throughout the novel: the empty flat, Mother Dimble, St. Anne's Manor, the Director, and Merlin are all reminders; but it is the voice of her own body that is heard above the rest. Jane feels a deep sense of loneliness which is not lessened by Mark's presence. Her escape lies in accepting the fecund power of her own body. She must ally herself with Venus and embrace her body as an image of the Church, the bearer of Christians, of "little Christs."[57]

Mark must learn a different mode of humility. His selfish ambitions must be set aside for the good of Jane. He finds that as he attempts to advance in the N.I.C.E. his labor becomes a kind of war, echoing Adam's conflict with the earth in the triplex curse of the thorns, thistles, and the sweat of the brow (Gen. 3:17–19). If he is to bear this burden, he can no longer look at his career as an opportunity for self-service; it must be transformed into an occasion for self-sacrifice. He can only accept this fact after he has contemplated the crucified Christ, the sacrificial Lamb. His willingness to die rather than trample the innocent victim suggests a new internal disposition to leave behind his old ambitions and to even lay down his life in service of another. He allies himself with Mars and learns the spousal meaning of his body as an image of *Christus Victor*, the victor who conquers by accepting suffering for the sake of love.

What has all of this to do with contraception? A central message of *That Hideous Strength* is that the use of artificial contraception is a manifestation of the hidden self-centeredness of Jane and Mark. It enables the "mal-adjustment between them"[58] which inhibits the consummation

[57] See also C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), Book IV, Chapter 8.

[58] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 383.

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of their marital love. Contraception stifles their ability for complete self-giving by allowing each spouse to hold back from the other: Jane withholds total self-surrender and Mark withholds total self-sacrifice. This retraction of love is felt in the couple's daily life through their "quarrels" and increasingly prolonged separations. Their attempt at "vindication" from the suffering that accompanies true love only traps them in a cycle of hurt and mistrust. They also lose sight of the spousal meanings of their bodies. Mark has become completely indifferent to the meaning of the sexes altogether: we are told that he unknowingly avoids using the words "man" and "woman" in his writing.[59] Jane has fallen into the opposite extreme. She finds herself completely "repelled" by men, who she says are "complacent, patriarchal figures making arrangements for women as if women were children or bartering them like cattle,"[60] yet the thing she detests even more is the "fluttering, tearful 'little woman' of sentimental fiction running for comfort to male arms."[61] The two views of sex they have imbibed, apathy and antipathy, are deeply broken in comparison to the richness that could be found by fully embracing the spousal meaning of their own bodies.

In addition to helping us understand the "mal-adjustment" in the Studdock's marriage, TOB also sheds light on Lewis's solution. Jane and Mark must come together at the end of the novel and share the marriage bed in the spirit of self-giving love. At this point we have received signs that they both prepared to accept Christianity. Thus, their marriage is ready to become sacramental. We saw in Section II that John Paul II believes the sacrament of marriage plays an essential role in the "salvific process" by healing the wound on human sexuality caused by carnal concupiscence. It is also unique from the other six sacraments in that it is mutually administered.[62] Just as each sex is incomprehensible without the other, neither sex can be healed without the other. The sexes are "reciprocally completing"[63] as a consequence of their becoming "one flesh." We see now why Lewis says that Mark's body "lacked" what only Jane's could give. Thus, Jane can say with Paul, "in my flesh I complete what is lacking

[59] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 424.
[60] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 454.
[61] Lewis, 3 *That Hideous Strength*, 83.
[62] John Paul II, TOB, 103:1.
[63] See also John Paul II, TOB, 134.

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in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body" (Col. 1:24). Reciprocal completion requires willing and active participation from both Jane and Mark. As human beings afflicted by carnal concupiscence, Jane and Mark find themselves "accused" by marriage and the profound heavenly reality it signifies; but more importantly, they are also "called" to and healed by it.[64] The mythological expression of this is Venus standing outside of the marital chamber, her gaze fierce but inviting.

The commitment of marriage requires Jane and Mark to learn *self-mastery*. Jane must overcome her vanity and surrender her invulnerability to Mark and to her future children. The mysterious meaning of her body is meant to be shared, but she cannot share what she cannot control. At the beginning of the novel, she finds herself crying "inexplicably" about her marriage; at the end, she acts with all the confidence of Venus herself. She is able to present herself to her bridegroom as the "master of her own mystery."[65] Mark must reciprocate her gesture by reorienting his own ambitions in service to her. This requires him to sympathize with her in order to learn her needs. "Sympathy," says John Paul II, "brings people close together, *into the same orbit*, so that each is aware of the other's whole personality, and continually discovers that person *in his own orbit*."[66] (my emphasis) Lewis uses this same imagery to convey how Mark makes other people into satellites of his ego; John Paul II flips the image to signify how the lover and the beloved orbit one another like binary stars.

The engine of true self-mastery is, of course, love. We can understand this in TOB as an outgrowth of the definition of the person, "towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love." The same understanding is present in Lewis's writings too. He writes to Mr. Pitman (1958) that "Love of every sort is a guard against lust, even, by a divine paradox, *sexual* love is a guard against lust. No woman is more easily and painlessly abstained from, if need be, than the woman one loves."[67] This is contrasted with the false form of self-mastery described by Professor Frost. He believes that a man can only become "governable" once he has "thrown [sex] away."[68] One

[64] John Paul II, TOB, 107:6.
[65] John Paul II, TOB, 110:7.
[66] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 90.
[67] Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:921.
[68] Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 509.

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way to throw sex away is to make it sterile and therefore purposeless. The pleasure can be had other ways. John Finnis's summary of Lewis's point here is quite blunt: "when procreation is *taken out* . . . marital intercourse becomes a kind of mutual masturbation…'each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other. . . .'"[69]

The idea that self-giving love has the power to undo the knots that *goeteia* twists should not be unfamiliar to scholars of Lewis. The climax of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* turns on exactly this point. The White Witch is able to bend the Deep Magic to maneuver Aslan into a place of vulnerability and victimhood. However, Aslan knows of "a magic deeper still." [70] The Deeper Magic declares that willing, self-sacrificial love has the power to restore life and to undo the curses of the witch's *goetic* magic. Self-giving love is redemptive. This principle goes right to the heart of the Studdocks's marriage. Love, says John Paul II, is a "power" of a divine character that enables man "to participate in the love with which God himself loves in the mystery of creation and redemption."[71]

Conclusion: The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

John Paul II develops a regenerate anthropology in his TOB that accords with C. S. Lewis's own "sacramental view of man" on a key moral issue: contraception. Both authors tell us that we must work *within* the bounds of our sexual nature, not *against* them. A proper working-within is what distinguishes *magia* from *goeteia*, regenerate from un-regenerate science. This requires humility, denial of self, openness to life, a willingness to suffer both with the other and for the other, and the action of divine grace.

The perceptive reader will notice that I have neglected to address an important question. Does Lewis leave room for any kind of lawful birth control? The question is not broached in the novel, and it remains unaddressed in his other writings. We saw in Section I that John Paul II looks favorably on NFP because it works within the natural order of

[69] John Finnis, "C.S. Lewis and Test-tube Babies," in *Human Rights and Common Good: Collected Essays Volume III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 281.

[70] C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 185.

[71] John Paul II, TOB, 127:1.

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fertility and not against it. In other words, it seems to fall within the realm of *magia*. Unfortunately, the question is further muddled by some ambiguities in *The Abolition*. He says, for example, that future generations are "denied existence" by the use of contraception, and this is supposed to be a knock against it. Ward puts his thumb on a potential issue with this argument when he asks, "Are future generations denied existence by celibacy or infertility as much as by contraception?"[72] By extension, we could ask, "Are future generations denied existence by NFP?" We cannot know for certain how Lewis would answer. All we can say with confidence is that Lewis seems to treat contraception as a clear instance of *goeteia*.

I do not want to give the impression that I have exhausted all of the connections between the Ransom Trilogy and TOB. I have only focused on *That Hideous Strength* because of the centrality of contraception and marriage to its plot. The other two books have very different emphases, but all of them find deep resonances with TOB. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, for example, Lewis explores the possibility of the existence of non-human persons. This goes right to the personalistic center of all John Paul II's writings. Furthermore, Lewis's portrayal of paradise and the Green Lady in *Perelandra* has deep theological undercurrents that come to life in the light of John Paul II's teachings on man's "original nakedness" and "original shame." I encourage future scholarship to continue pulling at these threads as they have the potential to penetrate deeper into Lewis's versatile and imaginative mind. Furthermore, Lewis's concerns surrounding artificial contraception in *That Hideous Strength* are only a subset of his more general concerns about scientism. There are many more branches of science in need of "regeneration" and Lewis treats some of them in the novel (*e.g.*, ecology) and each could prove to be a fruitful subject of analysis in future scholarship. Just as the "regeneration" of human anthropology requires a renewed consideration of human persons, I suspect one will find that Lewis envisions each science will be "regenerated" by a similar return to a consideration of their proper objects, to the things in themselves, as opposed to the modern method of detached and reductive observation.

I believe that a continued exploration of these two authors will further strengthen the claim that John Paul II develops a genuine "regenerate"

[72] Michael Ward, *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis's The Abolition of Man* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 235.

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human anthropology in his *Theology of the Body*, one which bears striking similarity to the one Lewis develops in the Ransom Trilogy. Our investigation of the two thinkers on the moral issue of contraception has revealed that the two share an underlying "sacramental view of man," male and female, in which one must learn to say, "This is my body which is given for you," (Lk. 22:19) and the other to respond, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). It tells us that the act of procreation is meant to be a participation in the ongoing creative and redemptive work of God. But it also says that this can only happen when the spouses are prepared to surrender themselves to the other in naked, self-giving love. This is a high calling. "Man must reconcile himself to his natural greatness."[73]

[73] John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 236.

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